4

Saints on the Edge: Reconfiguring Sanctity in the Welsh March

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The Norman conquest of Wales was not a straightforward process. The Normans arrived on the borders of what is now Wales within a year of the battle of Hastings, and by 1081 it looked very much as though Wales would follow England in falling to their onslaught. What followed, though, was over 200 years of piecemeal conquest, Welsh revival and Anglo-Norman reconquest, ended only in 1283 when the last Welsh ruler of Gwynedd was captured by Edward I of England.

Nor were the politics of the process simple. In the years immediately after 1066, Welsh rulers allied with Norman barons against other Welsh rulers. It was over a century before communities could be divided on racial lines. What emerged from this process was not a clear boundary between Welsh and Anglo-Normans but a wide (and fluctuating) zone known as 'the March', with its own laws and customs. Here Norman lords behaved like independent Welsh kings, while Welsh rulers learned to build castles and comport themselves like Norman knights (Lieberman 2008). It is within this zone of cultural interaction that we can situate the changing concepts of sanctity exemplified by Welsh hagiographies of the twelfth century.

The impact of this conflict and conflation of cultures on beliefs and values was complicated by contemporary developments in the European church. The traditional view is that the Normans brought with them the Gregorian reforms in ecclesiastical organization and monastic life, and all their implications: structural misogyny and increased hostility towards human sexuality. We are looking at the clash not just of two societies but of traditional and reformed churches. The same traditional interpretation suggests that these new ideas were rapidly assimilated and internalized by the Welsh. More recent research, however, suggests that some of the new ideas had already reached Wales: and some (clerical celibacy being the most obvious example) were never really adopted.

At about the same time as the Norman incursions (and possibly connected with the resulting clash of cultures), the *vitae* of many of the Welsh saints were written down, in some cases for the first time. We do know that earlier versions of the *vitae* of some saints existed but they have not survived (Davies 2002: 382-83).

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify earlier elements in the *vitae* and to suggest ways in which they have been reworked in the versions which survive. This reworking then enables us to study the crucial issues of conquest, colonization, cultural exchange and assimilation as they impact on religious beliefs and values. It is possible to consider how new ideas are imposed from outside, how ideas are internalized by subjected or vulnerable populations, and the extent to which 'new' ideas are there already.

This involves treating the *vitae* mainly as folk myth – neither as statements of 'fact' about earlier periods nor as pious inventions. In her study of the *vitae* of early Christian martyrs and desert hermits, Alison Goddard Elliot suggested that these lives should be read not as individuated narratives but as chapters of a single megatext. What matters to her is not the detailed incidents but the narrative 'deep structure', the matrix of symbolic motifs that recur in all these *vitae* and constitute their essential aspects (Elliot 2008). It is not necessary to reject altogether the detail of the Welsh *vitae*: often the nuances of the megatext can only be read in the detail (as in Henken 1991). However, these structuring motifs are clearly reflections of belief about what a saint *ought* to be and to do: as such they should be part of any analysis of the impact of colonization.

The *vitae* of the Welsh saints are a very difficult source, fraught with methodological problems. Their dating is generally uncertain, but virtually all the known *vitae* date from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries at the very earliest. Furthermore, most now survive only in even later copies and redactions. This is not to say that the Welsh did not write down the *vitae* of their saints in the pre-Norman period. John Reuben Davies has pointed to much earlier hagiographic material embedded in Welsh chronicles and Breton saints' lives (2002: 380-83). When Rhigyfarch embarked on his biography of St David in the early 1190s, he claimed to base his work on

> the oldest manuscripts of our country, and chiefly of his own monastery [...] eaten away along the edges and the backs by the continuous gnawing of worms and the ravages of passing years, and written in the manner of the elders. (James 1967: 48)

This description seems too detailed and specific (especially in its reference to the difficulty of the scripts) to be written off as an authenticating myth. However, while we may accept that St David's monastery had early versions of his *vita*, they are now lost to us. We have nothing to work on earlier than Rhigyfarch's own text.

The authorship of these *vitae* is also problematic. Rhigyfarch's life of St David is unusual in being so clearly attributable. The very concept of authorship may be inappropriate: how can a folk myth have an author? Thomas Heffernan has pointed

to the very complex relationship between author and audience and between oral and written tradition in the *vitae*, in a situation when the *vita* was being written down for an audience that had contributed much of the oral material (Heffernan 1988: 22-25).

Aron Gurevich suggests that, rather than classifying our material as élite or popular, literary or folk, we should look at the complexity of the relationship (1988: 1-38). Typically, the life of a saint can develop in the oral tradition and will then be recorded in outline. But the written outline can then be the basis for retelling and embellishment, the embellishments can be selectively recorded, and so on. Julia Smith has developed this perspective with a sensitive analysis of the reciprocal relationship between oral and written traditions in Breton saints' cults (1990). She points to the ways in which written texts have influenced cult practices involving sacred landscapes and landscape features such as holy wells. Oral, she insists, does not equate with popular, inauthentic or disreputable. The Latin *vitae* in the Breton hagiographic corpus include characteristic 'folk' traditions such as the veneration of secondary relics like bells and crosses rather than bones and shrines, and post-mortem miracles involving revenge rather than healing.

To analyse what these stories tell us about cultural change, we need at the least to know where in the cultural framework the story comes from, but even that is sometimes a matter of guesswork. Even the provenance of the written versions is often uncertain. There has therefore been considerable scepticism about the value of these *vitae* as historical sources. As a result of these uncertainties, the *vitae* of the Welsh saints have been treated as evidence for the period of writing rather than the periods they purport to describe (Davies 1982: 207). Embedded within them, though, is material which clearly dates from earlier periods. This can be tentatively recaptured by treating the stories as folklore. For the purposes of this study, though, our aim must be to try to establish how the *vitae* have been rewritten, to peel off the layers to recover earlier versions of the text, then to study the changes which we think have been made.

Vitae could be reworked to associate the saint with a new area or to explain the veneration of particular relics. Harrington notes references to Brigid's veil from the ninth century and to the wonder-working oak of Kildare (a late misinterpretation of the name) by the early thirteenth century (2002: 216). Rewriting could also stress the importance of a saint: the *vitae* of St Brigid from the ninth century onwards mention her consecration as a bishop (Harrington 2002: 214-15). By the eleventh century, though, the *vitae* of female saints in Ireland were being rewritten to include references to their shyness and humility, often, bizarrely, in stories which otherwise emphasize their power (Harrington 2002: 231-32).

Much of this analysis, of course, is based on the availability of early versions of the *vitae*. We simply do not have earlier versions of the Welsh lives. We can argue by analogy with the Irish and Breton lives, and we can make deductions about the extent and nature of earlier material embedded in the twelfth-century redactions which we have. However, without earlier texts to work from, there is an inevitable danger of circularity of reasoning and our conclusions must be very tentative.

The main focus of the present study is the twelfth-century *vitae* of St Gwenfrewi (*anglice* Winefride or Winifred). The standard study of these *vitae* is by Fiona Winward (1999); for a more recent analysis see Gregory (2012). I owe a great deal to Winward's meticulous study, though my reading of the gender issues and the relationship of the *vitae* to *Hystoria o Vuchedd Beuno* runs counter to hers.

These *vitae* have been chosen for a range of reasons. The *vitae* of Winefride are rare examples of the life of a female Welsh saint. Studying them enables us to look at gender issues as well as more general issues of organization, belief and practice. The story of Winefride is set in a very contested area of north-east Wales. Her home region of Tegeingl (northern Flintshire) was one of the first to be conquered from the Welsh and by the end of the eleventh century it had been incorporated into the earldom of Chester (Davies 1987: 31). However, a Welsh revival in the early twelfth century led to the expulsion of Normans in 1135, at around the time the *vitae* were written. Finally, the cult of Winefride was itself the subject of ecclesiastical conflict. Her first shrine at Holywell was disputed between the Benedictine monks of Chester and the Savignacs at Basingwerk. Her relics were taken from her second cult centre at Gwytherin (south of Conwy) to Shrewsbury in 1138.

The removal of her relics provided the context for one of the twelfth-century versions of her life: the *c* 1140 *Vita et translatio Sanctae Wenefredae* by Robert, the prior of Shrewsbury who masterminded the coup of acquiring the relics. This version survives in a twelfth-century copy in Oxford, Bodleian Laud Misc. 114, a thirteenth-century copy in Cambridge, Trinity College O.4.42, and a seventeenth-century copy in Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale 8072. It was edited by the Bollandists as *Vita secunda Sanctae Wenefredae, et ejusdem translatio* (*AASS* Nov. t. I: 708-731; for a translation see Pepin and Feiss 2000). The *Vita et translatio* is sensitively written in beautiful Latin. The author describes his sources as 'schedulas in ecclesiis patriae in qua deguisse dignoscitur [et] quorumdam sacerdotum relationibus', documentary evidence and folk tradition (*AASS* Nov. t. I : 708). However, it is very much an authored text, and very much (I would argue) from the perspective of an Anglo-Norman cleric.

The other *vita*, usually referred to as the *Vita Prima*, has a more complex history. It survives in an early thirteenth-century manuscript now in the British

Library, Cotton Claudius A.v., edited and translated by A.W. Wade-Evans in *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (1944; see also *AASS* Nov. t. I: 691-708 and Pepin and Feiss 2000). The manuscript is a collection of saints' lives thought to have been written at Worcester, and St Winefride is the only Welsh saint it contains. However, Worcester had connections with Shrewsbury and Robert dedicated the *Vita et Translatio* to Guarin, prior of Worcester 1124-42.

As its name suggests, the *Vita Prima* is probably earlier than the *Vita et Translatio*, though perhaps only slightly earlier. Winward (1999: 100 and 126-28) has indeed argued that the anonymous *vita* could have been written as late as the end of the twelfth century. For reasons which I explain below, I do not accept these arguments, but they are difficult to refute. Like Robert's *vita*, it claims the authority of tradition: *traditione veterum*, 'the tradition of the ancients'. The author could have been Welsh, and the written version could be part of the revival of Welsh hagiography which John Reuben Davies has identified from the eleventh century (2002: 380). In the context of early twelfth-century politics, this would make the *Vita I* part of the fight back against Norman encroachment on Welsh religious ideas and church property. Alternatively, it could have been written by a Norman monk from Basingwerk or Chester, the two houses which were disputing ownership of Winefride's well in the twelfth century (Winward 1999: 98-100). In his study of the *Liber Landavensis*, John Reuben Davies has demonstrated the extent to which the Norman church in south-east Wales used the cults of Welsh saints to bolster its own power (2003: 76-97). Norman authorship is suggested by the rather confused explanation of the saint's name and the tautologous description of her as *Candida Wenefreda*, 'White White Frewi'.

Even if we accept that the story was written down by an outsider, it is clearly based on folk traditions native to the area around Holywell. It contains (as we shall see) a number of motifs which identify it clearly with the Welsh hagiographic and folk culture. Parts of the *vita* are written in a very summary form, similar to the form in which some of the Welsh folk tales were recorded, giving an outline around which a storyteller could embroider a fuller account. Parts, in contrast, are already in a fully elaborated form. The choice of episodes for elaboration may be significant, though it could simply be a reflection of the sources.

The *Vita I* begins with Winefride/ Gwenfrewi herself at centre stage. The story is said to have taken place in the reign of King Cadfan of Gwynedd: that is, in the early seventh century. Her family background is explained: she is the daughter of Tevyth son of Eylud, a soldier and landowner. An only child, she is determined from an early age to dedicate herself to the religious life.

> Hec statim ab ineunte cepit etate sponsum adamare celestem hominesque transitorios respuens sibi soli suam dicavit virginitatem. (Wade-Evans 1944: 288)

Her father is initially grieved by her decision (partly because she is an only child) but is persuaded to approve it. A wandering saint, Beuno, arrives in the area and agrees to teach Winefride in return for land on which to build a church. There is a lengthy dialogue between Tevyth and Beuno and then between Tevyth and the king concerning Tevyth's wish to give part of his land to the church.

Thus far, the story includes features typical of Welsh and Irish tradition, but also idiosyncratic features. Unfortunately, the *vitae* of Winefride are the only surviving *vitae* of an entirely Welsh female saint. The only other 'Welsh' female saint whose *vita* survives in written form, Melangell/ Monacella, is said in that *vita* to have been Irish in origin (Pryce 1994). Some features of her life, such as the unresolved conflict with her parents over her vocation and the fact that she runs away from home to escape marriage, have clear parallels in the Irish tradition (Harrington 2002: 30-31). It is difficult, therefore, to establish whether the idiosyncratic features in Winefride's *vita* are indeed distinctive to the Welsh hagiographical tradition or merely to this one story.

The *topos* of the saint born into a wealthy family is a familiar one from Celtic,[11] Anglo-Saxon and international hagiography (Weinstein and Bell 1982: 194-219). The female saint who has to persuade her family of her vocation is also a familiar *topos*. One of the commonest motifs in the *vitae* of female Anglo-Saxon saints recorded by Goscelin is family pressure to marry (Millinger 1984: 124). What distinguishes Winefride is the ease with which her father is persuaded. There is no suggestion of the opposition we find in both the Irish and the international tradition. The story of Winefride contrasts here with the *Vita Sancta Monacella*, in which the saint describes herself as

> from Ireland, the daughter of the king of Iowchel. And because my father had decided [that I should be given] as a wife to a great and noble man of Ireland, fleeing my native soil, I came here to serve God and the spotless Virgin with my heart and a clean body for as long as I remain. (Pryce 1994: 40)

The *Vita Sancta Monacella* was written down in an area of mid-Wales with strong evidence of Irish settlement and it may contain elements of an Irish story transposed

[1] The term 'Celtic' really demands inverted commas: it is problematic in the extreme. Technically, it should only be applied to the Iron Age cultures of central Europe (Hallstadt, La Tène) and possibly Iberia. Here it is used as a convenient shorthand for 'Wales, Ireland, Cornwall, Brittany and Scotland' in the early medieval period. The implication is that these cultures share their linguistic roots and some common features; I do not suggest that there is any coherent common cultural, religious or political framework. For a succinct overview of the issues surrounding this very slippery term see Cunliffe (2003).

to a Welsh context. On the other hand, there is nothing exclusively Irish about this *topos*, which also occurs in the Anglo-Saxon and international traditions. The ease with which Winefride persuades her father also echoes at least one story from the international tradition, the life of the archetypal female martyr Catherine. There is no reason to assume that parental opposition to female vocations was not also a strand in Welsh hagiography. We simply do not have the evidence.

Beuno's close relationship with Winefride is typical of the relaxed attitude to male-female relations which is also found in Irish hagiography. Beuno builds a little church 'in Belyuc solitudine [...] in convalle que Britonum lingua Sechnant appellabatur' ('in the wilderness of Belyuc [...] in a ravine which is called in the British language Sechnant [Sychnant, dry valley]') (Wade-Evans 1944: 290-91). Unsupervised in this remote place he undertakes Winefride's spiritual instruction *divina pagina*.

There are numerous parallels in the Irish tradition of female saints living in close contact with male spiritual mentors. Monenna was taught by Patrick and Ibar, Lassair by Molaisse. Irish monasteries had mixed communities and schools for boys and girls (Harrington 2002: 232-33). This relaxed attitude is not 'Celtic' but Atlantic: the same tradition of mixed communities and freedom of relations between male and female religious also appears in the Anglo-Saxon hagiographic tradition. In England (as in Wales) it survived the Norman invasion but eventually succumbed to the pressures of the post-Gregorian church. Later versions of the *vita* of St Winefride describe Beuno as her uncle, her mother's brother, presumably in an attempt to sanitize the relationship.

The *Vita I* is ambiguous in what it says about the property rights of women. Winward points out that under traditional Welsh law women have no rights over land. Land belongs not to individuals but to the agnatic kin group. This, she suggests, is why so few lives of female saints survive in the Welsh hagiographic tradition. Welsh hagiography is to a considerable extent geared to establishing the property rights of the saint's monastic community: and a community of women founded by a female saint could have no such rights. It could also explain the lengthy section at the beginning of the *Vita I* which goes into so much detail about Beuno's offer to Tevyth and Tevyth's grant of land to Beuno with King Cadfan's permission. This could be read not as an attempt to diminish Winefride's central position in the *vita* but as a defence of the landed rights of her first community in Holywell. Beuno is in effect placed in the position of a trustee for the property of the community.

This section of the *vita* certainly suggests that the author of the *Vita I* , if not Welsh, was at least acquainted with the intricacies of Welsh land law. However, the earlier paragraph of the *vita* describing Tevyth's response to his daughter's decision

suggests that he had hopes of passing on his estate to her children: 'sadness was upon him [...] in that she declined to marry a man in order to maintain his patrimony in the future' (Wade-Evans 1944: 289).

The central episode of the story as told in the *Vita I*, as in the lives of so many female saints, concerns Winefride's defence of her chastity. Here, too, there are identifiably Welsh and 'Celtic' elements as well as elements familiar from the international tradition. Winefride's parents go to church leaving her to prepare the fire, water and salt needed for the Mass. This in effect places her in the rôle of a sub-acolyte. Female participation in the Mass was not unknown elsewhere in the Atlantic region. In the early sixth century a letter from the bishops of Tours, Angers and Rennes to two Breton priests castigated them for (among other things) allowing women to assist them to celebrate Mass (Padel 2002: 313). In the early church, women may have had an even more extensive role in public worship and in church life. Ute Eisen's study (2000) based mainly on epigraphic and hagiographic evidence identifies women described as preachers, prophets, teachers, priests and even bishops as well as the traditionally accepted roles of widow and deaconess.

Winefride's involvement appears in the *vita* solely as the reason why she is left at home on her own. Little is made of it: but by the same token no surprise is expressed at the idea of a woman performing such duties. What we have here is arguably an embedded folk tradition from an era when female sub-acolytes were accepted.

For the purposes of the plot, Winefride is at home so that she can be attacked. Caradoc, a local prince, is hunting nearby. Thirsty, he comes to the house to ask for a drink, is inflamed with lust for Gwenfrewi and propositions her. The unwanted royal suitor is also a common *topos* in Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and international hagiography (Millinger 1984: 124). Rosalind Love has suggested that Goscelin's evident enthusiasm for this theme may have been because they offered him 'a means by which the Anglo-Saxon female saints could be cast in the mould of their Roman sisters, beset by pagan suitors, with their mixture of blandishments and threats' (2004: cviii-cix). But as Winward points out, Winefride behaves with the cunning expected of women in the Welsh folk tradition (1999: 107-08). First, she argues that she is not worthy of Caradog: he is a prince, she is a commoner. Then she changes ground and claims to be engaged to another man. (By this she of course means that she is betrothed to God: but Caradog is supposed to assume she means an earthly competitor.)

This argument has some impact on Caradog: from simply desiring *procorum familiaritatem* he now offers marriage. Like Tevyth's response to Winefride's dedication, this has resonances of Catherine's debates with the Emperor. Afraid of Caradog's potential for violence, Winefride changes tack again and agrees to go

with him but asks to be allowed to change into more suitable clothes. She goes into the inner chamber, escapes and runs down the valley to the church.

There are clear parallels here with the Anglo-Saxon life of St Wulfhild, who escapes a forced marriage by climbing out of her chamber through the drains (Colker 1965: 421-22). Winefride's defiance of secular authority also has parallels in international hagiography: but her willingness to resort to cunning and even to deceit aligns her not with the innocent virgins of the international tradition but with the witty, intelligent women of Welsh legend.

Winefride's intelligence does not save her – at least, not in the first instance. Caradog sets spurs to his horse, pursues her as far as the church door and beheads her. Her head falls within the church; her body remains outside. Beuno immediately comes out of the church and curses Caradog, who 'melted in his presence as wax before a fire'. Then Beuno replaces Winefride's head and heals her, so that only a thin scar shows where she was beheaded. Where the ground was stained with her blood, a powerful spring gushes out; the stones are stained as if with blood. The moss there smells of incense and has healing powers.

This narrative surely demonstrates what Heffernan describes as 'the propensity of medieval Christian sacred biography to emphasize dramatized action over complex argument' (1988: 5). There are however complex arguments implicit in the text and deducible from it: Winefride's status in the church, her astuteness and willingness to defy secular authority, and her capacity for independent action. There are also resonances of both Welsh legends and Biblical traditions. The beheading of the saint and the focus on what happens to the head has clear parallels in the head cults of Iron Age Celtic iconography. While it is dangerous to over-emphasize the antiquity of the links between 'Celtic' head cults and holy wells, there is no doubt that holy wells are a distinctive feature of the Welsh sacred landscape (Jones 1954). Beuno perceives that God has performed the miraculous restoration on Winefride's account (and by implication not on Beuno's) and that the church he has founded is intended for her. He must go elsewhere: as Patrick had to leave Rosina Vallis, the Valley of Roses, so that it could be occupied by St David. Beuno and Winefride part *post benedictionem mutuam*: they are presented as equals. Every year at midsummer, she sends him a miraculous cloak which keeps him dry in the rain and warm in the wind. She places the cloak on the stone where he used to pray outside his church and it is taken by the sea to his new home. This control over the elements (and particularly over rain and the sea) is typical of Welsh saints and may conceivably derive from pre-Christian water cults.

Beuno has taught Winefride but in the *Vita I* he has nothing to do with her formal entry into the religious life. She has made her own vows to God; after Beuno's

departure she goes to Rome on a pilgrimage and there, in the presence of the relics of the saints, she offers herself entirely to God. The pilgrimage to Rome or the Holy Land was part of the *cursus honorum* for male Welsh saints (Henken 1991: 141). Irish saints, female as well as male, were inveterate wanderers. In a comparison of the *vitae* of Brigid of Ireland and Radegund of Tours (2001), Walter Berschin has drawn particular attention to Brigid's travels in her carriage, even suggesting that the carriage harks back to the chariots of Celtic female deities. Henken suggests that Welsh female saints do not journey around: but apart from the life of St Winefride and the much later Welsh life of the Irish saint Melangell we have no independent lives of Welsh female saints on which to base any such conclusion.

After her return, she is involved in a synod, the 'Synod of Wenefridus', which reorganizes religious life in Britain and adopts the Benedictine pattern of coenobitic monasticism. Wenefridus is completely unknown as a male name at this period (or since). It seems most likely that we have a synod summoned by Winefride herself on the original tradition but that the name has been reworked to create a fictional male leader. This is paralleled elsewhere – for example, the renaming of the Biblical apostle Junia as the male Junias in medieval translations (Brooton 1977) and the reinvention of the Gallo-Roman chthonic goddess Sequana as St Sequanus (Aldhouse-Green 1999: 2). Like the pilgrimage, the story of the synod is told in very summary form, but it has not been completely removed from the account. Tristan Gray-Hulse has suggested (personal communication) that the *Vita I* in its present form was designed to provide readings for the offices at Holywell and that this explains its focus on events at and near the well. However, the pilgrimage to Rome was clearly part of Winefride's status and it seems strange that it would be sidelined. The story of her move to Gwytherin is perhaps less germane to a narrative for use at the well, but we still need to consider alternative explanations. It is at least possible to argue that in the *Vita I* we have a reflection of an earlier version which depicts Winefride as a powerful reformer and religious leader. On the one hand, the implication of the later sections of the *Vita I* is that some twelfth-century writers at least considered it appropriate for a woman to be a pioneer of religious reform, travelling widely, picking up new ideas and taking the lead in implementing them. On the other hand, in the surviving version of the *vita*, this element has been squeezed almost out of existence in favour of more conventional hagiographic material – the dramatic defence of Winefride's chastity and the miracle of her healing.

In consequence of the synod, Winefride is herself chosen to preside over a religious community at Gwytherin (south of Conwy and about 25 miles from Holywell). There she teaches with knowledge and eloquence, her words sweeter than honey

and brighter than milk; and there, as the *vita* says, she rests in Christ (which is why it is assumed that the *Vita I* predates the translation of her relics to Shrewsbury). Interestingly – and paralleling Irish *vitae* of female saints – there is nothing on the daily life of her monastery (another contrast with the life of St Radegund noticed by Berschin), no detailed deathbed scene, and no evidence of reverence for her corporeal relics.

What we have here, I would suggest, is a life which was probably written down by a Norman redactor but based in Welsh folk myth, with features embedded from much earlier traditions. The *vita* is in line with the early medieval tradition of female sanctity identified by Schulenberg (1988). Like Begga, she goes on pilgrimage to Rome; like Radegund, Aurea, Sexburga and Tetta, she founds a religious community; like Hilda, Ebba. Mildred and Aelffled she takes an important part in councils and synods; like Gertrude of Nivelles, Hilda, Aelffled and Leoba, she is famous for her learning. Key elements in the *Vita Prima* – Winefride's status in the church, her capacity for independent action – have been reworked so that they are downplayed but not removed.

The *vita* is accompanied by a *libellus miraculorum* which is probably separate in origin. The style of the prose is very different. While the Latin of the *vita* is plain and unembellished, the style of the *libellus miraculorum* is inflated and full of rhetorical flourishes: exclamations ('O res satis horenda'), asides ('Non est mirum, fratres') and rhetorical questions ('Quid dicam vobis') (Winward 1999: 115). Winward has also observed that while the *Vita I* usually refers to Winefride as *martyr*, the *libellus* describes her as *virgo* or *puella* even after her death and resuscitation (1999: 115). Julia Smith suggests that the *libellus* was written by the monks of Basingwerk and bolted on to an essentially 'Celtic' *vita*, drawn from Welsh oral tradition. The *Libellus* was certainly written for performance – witness the rhetorical asides already referred to. The intended audience, however, was not monastic. The miraculous cure of the penitent man fastened in iron bands ends 'Perpendite, viri, perpendite, mulieres' – 'Consider, men, consider, women, how this virgin of the Lord and martyr should be honoured with reverence and veneration by all' (Wade-Evans 1944: 302-03).

The language of the *libellus* starts by referring to the Welsh as 'incolae', inhabitants, and later as 'indigenis', natives, though this could refer merely to their status as informed residents of the area where the traditions were collected. Wales is described as 'eadem terra', 'eadem regione', as if the writer is an outsider. However, this does not necessarily make the writer Norman. The descriptions of events as taking place 'diebus Francorum in eadem terra', 'tempore quoque Francorum' and so on, might equally well suggest that the writer was not a Norman either (Wade-

Evans 1944: 294-309). The revenge miracles are directed equally at Welsh and Normans. The robbers from Gwynedd who steal the animals from Winefride's church die horribly; the French knight who tries to move Beuno's stone is crippled and his wife who washes in the water of the well becomes barren. The well flows with milk for three days to celebrate the expulsion of the Normans from Gwynedd. If the *miraculi* were written down by a Norman monk, he was a Norman who had gone native.

Furthermore, the *libellus* is still very much in the Welsh tradition. It starts with miracles of revenge then shifts emphasis to miracles of healing: and crucially the focus is on the well and the sacred landscape rather than on corporeal relics. Winward has also pointed to some specific elements of 'Celtic' myth in the *miracula*: the three stones in the water, the well flowing with milk. However, the emphasis on the saint's power to defend her well and her community is in line with the powerful female saints studied by Schulenberg (1988: 113-14) and Millinger (1984: 121-23).

The *Vita et translatio* of Robert of Shrewsbury derives from the same folk tradition as the *Vita I* . Robert says he has based his account on 'documents from the churches of the country in which she is known to have lived' (*AASS* Nov. t. I: 708). He clearly did not see the *Vita I* (he specifically states that he has omitted the story of Winefride's pilgrimage because he has seen no documentary evidence for it). This has led some to argue that Robert's life must be the earlier text, but it is not difficult to suggest circumstances in which Robert might not have had access to the *Vita I*, especially if it was originally in Welsh hands. It is much more difficult to imagine circumstances in which the author of the *Vita I* would not have been aware of the translation of Winefride's relics.

Robert's *vita* starts from a different perspective. At the beginning, it is the story of Beuno, described as a distinguished saint who has founded a number of churches but has not been called to settle at any of them. He approaches Tevyth to ask for an endowment for another church. Winefride enters the story by the by, as the daughter who Tevyth commits to Beuno's care.

Robert's *vita* makes much less of Winefride's outwitting of Caradoc. There is no explanation of why she is not in church. In her simple innocence, she fails at first to understand what Caradoc wants. The central episode is not the attempted seduction but the resurrection: this is very vividly written but mainly geared to demonstrating Beuno's power. Robert makes a determined attempt to conflate two versions of the beheading story, one in which Winefride is beheaded outside the church and her head falls inside, the other in which she is beheaded at the top of the hill above the church and her head rolls down the hill. In Robert's conflation both

head and body roll down the hill, and he emphasizes the damage done to the head in the process.

Beuno comes out of the church to find Caradoc wiping the blood off his sword on the grass. Robert's comment on Caradoc's actions has clear Gregorian implications: 'Because he was the son of the king, he thought he could commit this offence with impunity [...] and he showed he had no fear of God' (Pepin and Feiss 2000: 36). With Winefride's head in his hands, Beuno curses the young man, accusing him of defiling his lineage, desecrating the church and the Sabbath, and begs God to punish him. The young man melts and the earth opens to swallow him.

Then Beuno cradles the head in his arms, kisses it – and goes back into church to finish the Mass. Robert is setting up a series of cliff-hangers, before Beuno will heal Winefride: but he is also emphasizing Beuno's powers, by extending the time that the head is separated from the body. Only after a sermon and a long prayer does he replace the head on her shoulders – 'and the girl arose as if from sleep, wiping the dust and sweat from her face' (*AASS* Nov. t. I: 714).

Much of the description of Winefride's beheading and resurrection in the *Vita I* and the *Vita et Translatio* is echoed by a later Welsh life of Beuno, the *Hystoria o Vuched Beuno*, the earliest known version of which dates from 1346 (Wade-Evans 1916-22: 18-19. The *Hystoria* has Winefride's dialogue with Caradog from the *Vita I* and the detail of Caradog wiping his sword, Beuno covering Winefride's body with his cloak and Winefride wiping the sweat and dust from her face from the *Vita et Translatio*. Winward suggests that both *vitae* may have been based on a Latin original of the *Hystoria*, though it at least equally likely that the *Hystoria* (or its putative Latin original) drew elements from both of Winefride's *vitae*.

Robert's account is closer to the 'Celtic' head/well tradition than the *Vita I* both in its emphasis on the damage to the head and in its account of the origins of the holy well. In the *Vita I* the well springs up where the ground is stained with Winefride's blood, and it is the moss growing there which has healing powers, but in the *Vita et Translatio* the well is where her head falls, and it is the water of the well which heals the sick.

After bringing Winefride back to life, Beuno receives her vows and gives her the veil. This formal admission into holy orders stands in contrast to the more informal process in the *Vita I*. As a reformed Benedictine, Robert of Shrewsbury is at pains to place Winefride in an organized religious community at Holywell, as well as giving more detail of the community at Gwytherin. His account of the origins of the Gwytherin community is also very different. Winefride follows Beuno's instructions to remain at Holywell and send him a cloak every year. After his death she seeks out other male spiritual mentors. The pilgrimage to Rome is replaced by a pilgrimage

across north Wales, travelling to St Deifer at Bodfari and St Sadwrn at Henllan. She is passed from mentor to mentor until she reaches St Elerius, who places her in a convent at Gwytherin ruled over by his mother Theonia. There Winefride becomes a focus for pilgrimage in her own lifetime, as devout people come to see the scar on her neck. After Theonia's death, she herself becomes abbess, but she remains under Elerius' supervision until her death. There is a lengthy deathbed scene preceded by her foreknowledge of her own death and followed by the story of the translation of her relics, which need not concern us here (for more detail on the relics see Gray 2015).

There is much in the *Vita et Translatio* which is not in the *Vita I* , in particular the description of Winefride's wanderings after Beuno's death and the different account of the establishment of the convent at Gwytherin. Robert seems to have collected accounts from further west than Holywell, possibly as a result of his visit to Gwytherin itself to take possession of the relics. He uses Welsh traditions of wandering saints and relationships between male and female saints but giving them a post-Gregorian emphasis. Winefride's status as a reformer is explicitly ignored: as foretold by Beuno, she gathers a community of religious women at Holywell and it is only after they as well as Beuno have died that she leaves. The community at Gwytherin is carefully described as a formal double community with separate cloisters for male and female members. Elerius takes Winefride's spiritual counsel but she is reluctant to take leadership of the community and only does so at Elerius' command. It is not that Robert wants to write the life of a male saint; there were plenty of male saints whose relics Shrewsbury could have identified, but they chose Winefride. (They did however return a few years later to collect Elerius as well; Falconer 1635: 172-73; Thomas 1908-13, ii: 313; though Breeze has recently challenged Eleri's existence: Breeze 2012). What Robert has done, though, is to reconfigure the saint's story to emphasize her youth, her vulnerability and her dependence on male guidance.

It is surprising at first to find Robert, a Benedictine monk, rejecting a story which linked his chosen saint with the introduction of Benedictine monasticism to Britain. However, there may have been issues of ecclesiastical politics in his reworking of the narrative. By the twelfth century the Benedictines were the traditionalists; the reformers were the new orders like the Savignacs of Basingwerk. If it was indeed the monks of Basingwerk who wrote down the *Vita I*, it is possible that they had an interest in emphasizing Winefride's responsibility for introducing monastic reform. On the other hand, the compression and downplaying of that part of her story could indicate unease at the portrayal of a woman as a reforming leader in a church increasingly concerned with issues of orthodoxy and purity.

The other key difference – and this is what identifies *Vita I* as belonging in the Welsh tradition – is in the attitude of the two *vitae* to Winefride's relics. In line with the 'Celtic' tradition (Ireland and Brittany as well as Wales) the *Vita I* is not focussed on corporeal relics. This is not to say that the western churches completely ignored the bodies of the saints. Welsh churches contained relics, and the early versions of a number of parish names include the element *merthyr* (from *martyrium*, a place of relics). However, the body of the saint was never the main focus for veneration. The early Church in the west was more likely to venerate what are now called 'secondary' relics, articles hallowed by association with the saint such as books, bells and croziers (Edwards 2002: 244-65; Gray 2015). Crucially, the concept of *furta sacra*, the 'holy theft' of even the most fragmentary relics, is completely foreign to the Welsh tradition (Gray 2015). Division of relics spread from the Eastern church as early as the fourth century, and translation of saints' bodies was taking place in Scotland and Ireland by the seventh or early eighth centuries. In Wales and Brittany, by contrast, the available evidence suggests a continuing reluctance to disturb corporeal remains (Edwards 2002: 243). This unease about the violation of corporeal relics provides an undercurrent of tension in Robert of Shrewsbury's story of the removal of Winefride's relics. Corporeal relics as holy objects in themselves, detached from their context, were obviously Robert of Shrewsbury's main concern: and this was a concern which the Normans brought from continental Europe. The implication of the closing section of the *Vita Prima* ('The place where she abode with the virgins is called Gwytherin, where also after the close of life, buried with the virgins [...] she rests in Christ'; Wade-Evans 1944: 295) is that Gwytherin was her chosen place and there she should remain.

Should we see the reworking and eventual reconfiguration of the traditions about St Winefride purely in terms of a clash of cultures, conquest followed by conflation? Both the *Vita I* and the *Vita et translatio* were written in precisely the period of religious change already mentioned, in the aftermath of the Gregorian reforms with their increasing hardening of attitudes towards relations between church and state, clerical celibacy and the role of women in the church. The traditional view is that these reforms were brought into Wales by the Normans. However, analogies with the *vitae* of Irish saints rewritten in the twelfth century suggest that some at least of the new ideas may have reached Wales independently, even if they were adopted by the Welsh as a way of attempting to defend their ecclesiastical independence. Christina Harrington has pointed, for example, to the insertion of misogynistic motifs and the increased harshness on matters of sexual morality in Irish hagiographies written in twelfth-century Armagh, at the time when the diocese was seeking international approval for its attempts to be regarded as Ireland's metropolitan see (2002: 235).

There are also Welsh parallels: Rhigyfarch's account of St David's conception by rape is the product of increasing unease about human sexuality, in spite of the fact that Rhigyfarch was the son of a bishop and had children of his own (*Dictionary of Welsh Biography s.v.* Rhygyfarch). The picture he gives of life in David's monastic community with its emphasis on silence, austerity and physical hard work, looks like the founding spirit of the Cistercian order: but the first Cistercian community was founded in 1098 and it is unlikely that its fame had spread to Wales by Rhigyfarch's death the following year. Here, then, we have a *vita* written in Welsh Wales which responds to the contemporary political situation but which makes it clear that Welsh culture had absorbed and internalized new ideas even before the arrival of the Normans.

In conclusion, what models of cultural conflict and change do these rewritten hagiographies suggest? The picture is a complex one. The surviving *vitae* of Winefride, like those of David, do embody conquest and intellectual colonization, the assimilation and internalization of alien ideas. However, they also suggest an intellectual milieu which was already open to new ideas and new influences. Nor should we approach these *vitae* with an analysis which opposes written to oral versions, élite culture to folk tradition. The surviving *vitae* involve elements of all of these, in a complex relationship which has more to do with cultural appropriation and conflation than with conflict and hegemony.[2]

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